

## Message Text

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TAGS PGOV, CASC, SHUM, AR  
SUBJECT FOREIGN MINISTRY REAFFIRMS RELIGIOUS REGISTRY;  
SUPREME COURT RULES ON JEHOVAHS WITNESSES CASES

REF: A BUENOS AIRES 1227, B BUENOS AIRES 1164

1. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN A COMMUNIQUE  
PUBLISHED TODAY (FEB 17) ANNOUNCED THAT THE  
NEW LAW ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL REGISTRY OF  
NON-CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS GROUPS WILL NOT LIMIT  
FREEDOM OF RELIGION, A RIGHT WHICH IS GUARANTEED  
BY THE CONSTITUTION. THE COMMUNIQUE EXPLAINED  
THAT THE NATIONAL REGISTRY IS MERELY A CONTINUATION  
AND EXTENSION OF THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT  
WHICH HAS EXISTED SINCE 1948, BUT APPLIED IN THE  
BUENOS AIRES AREA ONLY. (SEE REFTTEL A.) AT  
PRESENT 1,614 RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS, REPRESENTING  
MORE THAN 7,000 RELIGIOUS AFFILIATES, ARE REGISTERED  
WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. THE COMMUNIQUE ADDS  
THAT THE COUNTRY HAS ALWAYS BEEN "GENEROUS" ABOUT  
FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND THAT THE PROOF IS THE GOOD  
RELATIONS WHICH EXIST BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE MANY  
VARIED RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY.

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2. THE STATEMENT DENIED THAT THE NEW LAW FAVORS THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH, WHOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE WAS  
PREVIOUSLY DEFINED IN AN AGREEMENT IN 1966.(CATHOLIC  
CHURCH SOURCES CONFIRMED THAT CATHOLICISM IS NOT AN  
OFFICIAL STATE RELIGION IN ARGENTINA, ALTHOUGH THE  
CONSTITUTION STATES THAT THE "FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL  
UPHOLD THE CATHOLIC RELIGION," AS THE MAJORITY RELIGION

IN THE COUNTRY.)

3. AN EDITORIAL IN TODAY'S LA NACION DISCUSSING JEHOVAHS WITNESSES POINTED OUT THAT A RECENT SUPREME COURT DECISION (SEE PARA 5) DEMONSTRATES HOW THE ARGENTINE STATE PROTECTS ALL RELIGIOUS FROM

WRONGFUL TREATMENT. EMPHASIZING THE COUNTRY'S TOLERANCE FOR ALL RELIGIONS, THE EDITORIAL HOWEVER WENT ON TO CRITICIZE THE JEHOVAHS WITNESSES SECT, WHICH IT STATED CAN "PROVOKE SERIOUS CIVIC AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND INTRODUCE CONFUSION BETWEEN THE EXACT CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND THE FORMAL RESPECT DUE TO NATIONAL SYMBOLS." BY PERMITTING THIS CONFUSION, THE WHOLE OF CHRISTIANITY CAN RUN INTO CONFLICT WITH ANY TYPE OF FORMAL HOMAGE TO NATIONAL SYMBOLS OR POLITICAL DIGNITARIES, OVEGUI OBSERVED LA NACION.

"FURTHERMORE, IF THE RIGHT TO DENY COMMON CIVIC OBLIGATIONS IS PERMITTED TO EVERYONE IN THE COUNTRY, THEN TOMORROW ANY GROUP CAN EXCUSE ITSELF FROM ITS CIVIC OBLIGATIONS USING MOTIVES THAT MAY DERIVE FROM PERSONAL INTERESTS." IN CONCLUSION, THE EDITORIAL NOTES THAT "THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC RESPECTS AND TOLERATES ALL BELIEFS; IT ONLY ASKS FOR RESPECT FOR THE NATIONAL IDENTITY."

4. ACCORDING TO YESTERDAY'S LA RAZON,<sup>19</sup> JEHOVAHS WITNESSES WERE ARRESTED IN RIO NEGRO PROVINCE FOR PRACTICING THEIR RELIGION. REPORTEDLY ALL WERE LATER RELEASED BY THE LOCAL JUDGE.  
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5. THE SUPREME COURT DECISION CITED BY LA NACION WAS IN FAVOR OF A STUDENT WHO HAD BEEN EXPELLED FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MISSIONES PROVINCE BECAUSE SHE BELONGED TO THE JEHOVAHS WITNESSES SECT. THE SUPREME COURT, IN REJECTING TWO LOWER COURTS DECISIONS, RULED THAT THE EXECUTIVE DECREE BANNING THE ACTIVITIES OF THE JEHOVAHS WITNESSES AND CLOSING DOWN ITS ESTABLISHMENTS DID NOT GO SO FAR AS TO PERMIT THE EXCLUSION OF ITS MEMBERS FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL. THE COURT NOTED THAT IN RULING AGAINST THE GIRT, THE LOWER COURTS DID NOT SHOW THAT SHE HAD REFUSED TO HONOR NATIONAL SYMBOLS; THEREFORE, THEIR RULING UPHOLDING HER EXPULSION WAS "EXCESSIVELY RITUALISTIC" AND LACKING IN FOUNDATION. WITHOUT "IMPLYING ANY OPINION INTO THE HEAR OF THE MATTER" (VALIDITY OF THE EXPULSION), THE SUPREME COURT RETURNED THE CASE TO THE LOWER APPEALS COURT FOR FURTHER SUBSTANTIATION.

6. COMMENT: THE ARGUMENTS OF LA NACION AGAINST THE JEHOVAHS WITNESSES "EXCESSIVELY RITUALISTIC" AS THEY MAY SOUND TO USE-- GIVE A GOOD INDICATION OF OFFICIAL SENTIMENT TOWARD THE SECT AND STRONGLY SUGGEST THAT THE WITNESSES MAY FIND THEMSELVES REFUSED INCLUSION IN

THE NEW NATIONAL RELIGIOUS REGISTRY. THE SUPREME COURT  
ITSELF, IN ITS DECISION ON THE GIRL'S EXPULSION CASE,  
AS IN ITS DECISION ON THE JEHOVAHS WITNESSES OWN "EQUAL  
PROTECTION" CASE WHICH WAS REJECTED HERE RECENTLY  
(SEE REF B) HAS ONCE AGAIN SIDESTEPED THE HEART OF THE  
WITNESSES CASE, IE, A JUDICIAL DETERMINATION ON THE  
SECTS VALIDITY AND RIGHT TO EXIST IN ARGENTINA. BY  
PEGGING THE WITNESSES CASE ON ITS FULFILLING THE  
REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT,THE COURT HAS LEFT IT UP  
TO THE EXECUTIVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SECT AS A VALID  
RELIGION IN THE COUNTRY OR NOT. THE GOVERNMENT INFLUENCED  
LA NACIONS EDITORIAL STRONGLY SUGGESTS THE WITNESSES  
MAY HAVE A HARD TIME CROSSING THAT HURDLE. THE NEW  
NATIONAL REGISTRY IN AND OF ITSELF WILL NOT BE THE CAUSE  
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OF THE WITNESSES PROBLEMS WITH THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH  
DATE BACK TO PERON'S FIRST PRESIDENCY IN 1950.EXCEPT  
FOR LAST YEAR'S BANNING OF THE HARE KRISHNA AND DIVINE  
LIGHT SECTS BY THE EXECUTIVE, IT IS NOT ANTICIPATED  
THAT OTHER NON CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS GROUPS WILL HAVE  
PROBLEMS RE REGISTERING ON THE NEW NATIONAL LIST.  
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